

Rainbow SIG Newsletter

Volume 9, Number 1, Fall 2002

These articles appeared in the Fall 2002 edition of Lesbigan SIGnals.

- Panel Addresses Cultural Norms and Advising of International GLBT Students in the U.S.
- New Name for SIG
- Discussion on Human Rights at NAFSA San Antonio Conference
- Report from the SIG Chairs
- NAFSA 2003 Salt Lake City Conference Upcoming Highlights
- Perspective from Mexico City
- New and Improved SIG Web Site!
- SIG Member Profile: Interview with Mark Thackaberry
- Viewpoint from the Equator
- Rewarding Opportunities for GLBT Students Going to Eastern Europe: A Look at Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary
- NAFSA Region XII Conference in San Jose Holds First Rainbow SIG Meeting

Panel Addresses Cultural Norms and Advising of International GLBT Students in the U.S.

Joe Murnan, Hariri Foundation

Participants who attended the May 2002 NAFSA National Conference in San Antonio were able to participate in a session on "GLBT Issues in Many Cultures: Insights for International Student Advisers." The participants were Bo Keppel, Art Turmelle, Joe Murnan, Parandeh Kia, a director of an SIT program, a gay former international student in the U.S., Daniel Soto, and a director of an SIT program. Panelists discussed the environments for GLBT persons in the following countries: France, Korea, Iran, Armenia, the Andean Region of Latin America, Central America, Lebanon, and the Arab World.

By discussing these environments our goal was to assist international student advisors in providing support and resources for GLBT international students from these countries when they study in the United States. A gay former international student in the U.S. described the efforts he went through to find resources and information on GLBT issues and support for him. He also provided suggestions for international student offices to assist GLBT international students. The following suggestions were made:

1. Create a section on their web page related to international GLBT students, just as they have specific sections for international Latin, African, Asian, and Middle Eastern students.
2. Invite foreign GLBT guest speakers to speak at one of the international student events.
3. Distribute brochures/flyers and make available more information in their office and on their web site about GLBT resources on campus, in their cities, etc.
4. Include a brochure in the international student application packet about student clubs that are available on campus (including GLBT clubs).
5. Introduce international students to the concepts of counseling or psychotherapy, since in many countries it is regarded as treatment for crazy people only.
6. Anonymously survey all international students upon their arrival at school to determine what type of services, support, and resources they expect from the International Student Office. Re-evaluate or ask for feedback on a regular basis.

The session was well received in the evaluations and comments afterwards.

New Name for SIG

Jacqueline Bedard, University of California

After a membership vote, the NAFSA Lesbigan SIG name has been officially changed to the NAFSA Rainbow SIG. This name reflects a more diverse population base being supported by the SIG, which now explicitly includes persons who identify as transgendered. All of the SIG's resources have been revised to reflect this change of name and broadening of the mission statement. Our web site URL has not changed, although the web site content has been updated.

<http://www.indiana.edu/~overseas/lesbigay/>.

Discussion on Human Rights at NAFSA San Antonio Conference

Daniel Soto, Indiana University

Safety is of the utmost importance in these days of global terrorism and widespread ethnic and religious tension. An increasing number of NAFSA members feel that our national organization must work closely with human rights organizations such as Amnesty International to ensure that Americans who study abroad, as well as international students on U.S. campuses, are protected. Care should be taken to make certain that students are going to countries, and to regions within those countries, that are safe, inclusive, and respectful of human diversity. If a student's area of study must

take him or her into parts of the world where discrimination and harassment based on gender, religion, ethnicity, race, or sexual orientation are known to be prevalent, NAFSA must take all steps necessary to inform the student of the risks involved, and to advise him or her of the best ways of handling potentially volatile situations and where to go for help when there are problems involving harassment or discrimination.

These topics were addressed in depth by a panel discussion entitled *Are Human Rights Endangered by Globalization?* at NAFSA's annual meeting held in San Antonio, Texas, last May. The panelists included: Michael Heflin, director of Amnesty International's OUTFront Program for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Human Rights; Isidro Bruno, Director of Indiana University's Leo R. Dowling International Center; Alyson Kozma, Amnesty International Specialist for Women's Rights and Membership Coordinator; and panel moderator Daniel Soto, who is Amnesty International Country Specialist for Honduras and Panama and a member of AI's Midwest Action Task Force. The panel's presentation received high praise from the more than 100 conferees that attended the session.

Report from the SIG Chairs

Dear Members,

The last six months have passed in the blink of an eye. During that time, the Lesbigan SIG has undergone both a name and mission change, thanks to the contributions of the Advisory Board and the Membership. Our new name and mission reflect the Members' desire to make it apparent that we are inclusive of transgendered persons. Our new name is Rainbow SIG. The mission of the Rainbow SIG is to bring together NAFSANS who share the following goals:

- to counsel international students and U.S. students who study abroad who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered
- to support gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered professionals in international education
- to combat homophobia, heterosexism, and transphobia within NAFSA

NAFSA's leadership quickly conveyed its acceptance of the name change.

Now the SIG is in the throes of updating the web site and the SIG literature to reflect this revised name and mission. These changes are expected to be complete by NAFSA's Annual Conference in Utah next May 2003.

10th Anniversary Celebrations

As active Rainbow members know, this academic year marks the 10th anniversary of the Rainbow (formerly know as the Lesbigan) SIG. There are several activities planned

for the NAFSA Utah conference, including a larger, high-profile SIG reception, a proposed slate of GLBT-focused poster sessions, and much more! It will certainly be the year our membership does not want to miss.

To provide assistance with the 10th Anniversary celebrations please contact: Scott King at sking@odu.edu

Those interested in coordinating fundraising please contact:

Kevin or Jacqueline at morrike@earlham.edu or jbedard@eap.ucop.edu.

We have one volunteer but always welcome more.

We look forward to seeing you at the 2003 National Conference!

NAFSA 2003 Salt Lake City Conference Upcoming Highlights

Scott King, Old Dominion University

One of the highlights of the Salt Lake City conference should be the poster session sponsored by the Rainbow SIG. Fifteen poster presentations will cover the various contributions of our SIG to our colleagues in international education. Orientation programs for LGBT students, issues of rights and freedoms in other nations, advising LGBT international students—these are just a few of the areas that will be a part of this important session.

Plans for our celebration anniversary reception are also in the works—this should be the best ever. (And anyone who has been to earlier parties knows that topping them will be a challenge.)

The Rainbow SIG will be present and visible at our 10th anniversary in Salt Lake City. Be sure to join our efforts.

Perspective from Mexico City

Edgar Sánchez, Instituto Tecnológico de Monterrey-Mexico City Campus

Perhaps when you first think about Mexico City ideas like pollution or a macho culture come to mind. But it might be interesting to know that the largest city in Latin America has been waking up, little by little, to an emerging gay culture; in particular the city has

been stepping ahead of most of the country's resort areas and the countryside in terms of building a gay culture, a gay community, and a progressive environment.

There are an increasing number of gay businesses in Mexico City, and the community meets in neighborhoods like the Condesa or San Angel where small cafes, restaurants, bars, hotels, bazaars, and galleries are popular places to have a good time with friends, gay or straight.

Even though some influential remains of the traditional conservative, Catholic, and macho culture exist, which in the past meant it could be (socially and physically) dangerous to be identified as gay, things are different now. In particular, a younger generation is embracing diversity more than ever. Television broadcasts some of the most popular U.S. American shows with gay characters (Dawson's Creek, Will & Grace, Queer as Folk, etc.) and there are some innovative local radio shows like "Triple G" where different topics are discussed from a gay cultural perspective along with the top music hits of the international billboard. When it comes to nightlife entertainment, Mexico City offers great dancing venues in very different "antros" (as we call the clubs here) that share a relaxed and safe environment.

If you are an international academic or an international student studying in Mexico, most of the higher education institutions offer a friendly environment even though it is wise to find out if the school you are planning to attend is conservative or not. As a general guideline, it is smart to make friends with local Mexican gays, who will know how to be a part of the community and to enjoy Mexican gay culture. If you have specific concerns, or questions you may email me at: edgarsan@itesm.mx.

New and Improved SIG Web Site!

Kathleen Sideli, Indiana University

If you haven't visited the SIG's Web site lately, please take a moment to stroll through its pages: (<http://www.indiana.edu/~overseas/lesbigay>).

You'll discover that the site has been revised to reflect our new identity as the Rainbow SIG. SIG members who were at our meeting in San Antonio and/or who subscribe to the listserv know that the membership voted to change the name of the SIG from Lesbigan to Rainbow to make evident the fact that we are inclusive. Since our listserv has always been called 'Rainbow' and our homepage design has been a rainbow for the last few years, the new name matches our various motifs quite harmoniously. More importantly, we have also changed all the references to our constituency to include transgendered individuals. (Note: We have left the term 'Lesbigan SIG' only in past newsletter articles and references.).

Other updates include new resources for students on the U.S. Students Abroad page, particularly under 'Area and Country Information,' with similar information now available under 'Advising Resources' as well. We continue to invite the field to share materials with us so that we can expand our resources, particularly those targeted for students. Our site is listed widely through publications and Web sites (well over 100), which is the reason we have kept our "url" the same, at least for now. However, we are in dire need of resources for international students so we encourage you to send materials relevant to their situation to my attention at: sideli@indiana.edu.

A heartfelt thank you to those who have provided assistance with the site, particularly for going through the links on our site to alert us to those that needed updating or elimination and for cataloguing the newsletter articles so that we can make them available to people in a topical rather than just chronological manner. We hope to have that feature available early in 2003. Also in the works is an annotation of our bibliography.

SIG Member Profile: Interview with Mark Thackaberry

Eero Jesurun, CIEE

Mark Thackaberry is Director of the International Student and Faculty Office at Northern Illinois University (NIU). Mark started in the Admissions Office at NIU. In 1973, he accepted a position as foreign student advisor at NIU to 60 students and is now director of an office that provides support and resources to over 1,000 foreign students and faculty. Mark is one of the first Lesbigoay/Rainbow SIG members and will be retiring from NIU in December 2002.

Eero Jesurun: When did you start attending NAFSA? What was it like to be a gay NAFSA member then?

Mark Thackaberry: I have been going to NAFSA conferences since 1973 with the exception of one. In the 1970's there was not a lot happening with gay issues at NAFSA and nobody talked about it openly. You did not want people to know that you were gay as a professional. At that time, the film "Boys in the Band" had produced a widely negative stereotype of gay people. [The NAFSA conference scene] changed in the eighties when some gay members who would bump into each other at local [gay] bars. Some members knew that others were gay or they suspected that they were gay, and there was a social scene of gay men. Women were not a part of this scene. I was fortunate since I work on a campus that is open to gay issues. I did not have a specific need to talk about them since there were already resources and support on my campus. On the other side, there were professionals [in the eighties] who came from small schools or Jesuit institutions where one did not even discuss gay issues. At the NAFSA conference, they had to be closeted and careful.

EJ: How did the first SIG meeting get organized?

MT: At the 1991 conference in Boston, there was the first social gathering at the home of a NAFSA member, who later died of AIDS. We were not an official group yet, but there was a distinct sense of wanting more discussion about the issues facing us in the field. The following year, I helped to organize a social event at the Chicago NAFSA conference at a friend's house in the city. I remember we put up posters to announce it at the conference and people would tear them down. Scott King was the one who encouraged us to become a formal part of NAFSA and organize a SIG, so that we could be formally recognized by NAFSA. That happened the following year.

EJ: As an "out" professional, what else is different between then and now in your role as foreign student advisor?

MT: Many students and faculty (including foreign nationals) were dying of AIDS, in the early eighties. I remember we had a Ph.D. student from the Philippines who was diagnosed with AIDS. There was a group of 20 of us who collected money on a weekly basis to help this student while he was in the United States. Now this has changed. We enroll foreign students who have the HIV virus, but many of them are able to return to their countries after completing their studies. Times have changed.

EJ: What are some of the positive experiences you have had at NAFSA?

MT: When SIG members and others started to wear the rainbow stickers on their badges, there was a positive reaction of support from various people at NAFSA. This was a good feeling. In comparison to other national higher education associations to which I belong, NAFSA has allowed for more accessible channels to GLBT issues. At one point NAFSA had a gay president -- but there was an unspoken rule at the time: "There are things that you don't talk about, but are obvious." At another national higher education organization there was a lot more conservatism because members would compare the creation of a gay interest caucus the same as allowing ax-murderers to organize as a group. At NAFSA, I did not hear those kinds of comments when we created the SIG.

EJ: Is there a challenge being a gay administrator in the field of international education today?

MT: Yes, like any place, it depends on the politics of your boss. In many cases, religious motivation determines the attitude towards sexual orientation and the work place. It is subtler now. I know there are many openly gay advisors [in the U.S.], and it still bothers some of the students who they work with. Another concern is that not many women are coming out at NAFSA. This is worrisome.

EJ: Why did women have a seemingly marginal role in NAFSA when it comes to GLBT issues?

MT: The SIG currently has some very dynamic women, but they are mostly straight. Going back to the 1980's, many of the women would not be the ones going to the gay bars [at NAFSA conferences] to meet other gays. Another reason was that some of the women were in relationships and did not seek out to socialize with other gay or lesbian NAFSA members. It's just how it was at that time.

EJ: In 2003, the SIG will celebrate its 10th Anniversary when the NAFSA Conference is in Salt Lake City, Utah. Do you have any advice for those of us who will be attending this and future conferences?

MT: Going to Salt Lake City will be very interesting. You'll encounter Mormon attitudes and some repression albeit that there are some nice bars. [The SIG membership] should be visible, especially when there are negative laws and attitudes. On the one hand, NAFSA should not go to cities that do not embrace diversity, but when it does, we should encourage visibility. There are gay people everywhere. SIG members should run for NAFSA offices and leadership roles. It is important that our voice is heard.

Viewpoint from the Equator

David Roseberry, Seattle Central Community College

David Roseberry works as Program Coordinator for International Education Programs at Seattle Central Community College and spoke with an international student from Singapore—Victor Vanderloo—on his campus.

“A journey of a thousand miles begins with a first step; I took the first step out about eleven months ago. I moved from Singapore, a city of sunshine, to Seattle, a city that has a reputation for high rainfall.” And so Victor Vanderloo came to Seattle Central Community College to begin his program in Social and Human Services. Fortunately for us here, he has done much more.

Earlier this year, Victor took over as local chapter coordinator of the Lesbian and Gay Immigration Rights Task Force. He is one of the youngest volunteer coordinators in the Seattle chapter's history, and many were skeptical of his ability to take on the challenge. On October 24th of this year, Victor organized a Town Hall Meeting to advocate for HR690, the Permanent Partners Immigration Act, co-sponsored by the LGIRTF, the Human Rights Campaign, ACLU, and several other LGBTQ organizations. The meeting was overwhelmingly successful with over 200 participants, including U.S. Representative Jim McDermott, who provided support and opening remarks. Victor himself gave a very moving speech on his own situation. “Many strangers came up to give me support with tears in their eyes after they heard my speech. That was totally empowering.”

Since the Town Hall, Victor has been flooded with job offers from social service agencies in Seattle, and will soon be interviewed by local public radio host Deborah Brandt on the local NPR affiliate. Victor hopes to complete his degree in Social Work so he can be an advocate for the Asian population in the United States, and the LGBTQ community.

“Over the last eleven months, I had grown both intellectually and emotionally,” Victor says. “For the first time in my life, I felt completely liberated, and was able to be who I am. Living in a country where homosexuality is a taboo, coming out has never been an option for me. However, living in Seattle has enabled me to be truthful to myself.”

Rewarding Opportunities for GLBT Students Going to Eastern Europe: A Look at Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary

Jill Phelps, CIEE

Sending American students to a former Communist country that is undergoing political transition offers them distinct insights. After the fall of the Berlin wall, more and more student exchanges have taken place to Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary. In particular, these countries offer exciting opportunities and different challenges for young GLBT scholars from U.S. colleges. As a study abroad advisor, there are various cultural considerations you may want to communicate with your students that are unique to this area of the world.

In general, many GLBT students comment that they identify with the greater awareness and sense of political and social freedoms people embrace in Eastern Europe. The demise of Communism has led to an emerging civil society with NGOs, support groups, and student organizations that address GLBT issues and concerns. Especially in cities such as Prague, Warsaw, and Budapest, an active and vibrant gay community is easily found. In the 1990's more bars, nightclubs, and social groups that cater to a gay constituency in urban areas had become common (extremely less so in rural areas). For instance, the Warsaw School of Economics has an active GLBT group that organizes social and awareness activities. Prague has many popular gay bars, clubs, and associations. Budapest offers the same social opportunities but is lesser known among foreigners.

Media freedom has led to some excellent GLBT resources. Prague publishers produce gay magazines in Czech, German, and English. Students can find GLBT publications in Budapest such as Masók (“The Others”) in Hungarian and The Budapest Flame in English. This invigorating sense of freedom also is revealed in the annual pride parade in Budapest in early summer. Magazyn Men! is a publication geared towards gays in

Warsaw. Nowadays, GLBT resources for Eastern Europe are easily found on the internet (albeit not always in English).

Institutional religion is not a major barrier for GLBT individuals in this region. For many years, Communism forbade religion as “opium for the masses.” Interestingly, the Roman Catholic Church in Hungary and the Czech Republic collaborated with the Communist government and became even less influential once the country transitioned politically. Conservative Church views regarding homosexuality resonate less in these countries. In contrast, the Catholic Church played a unique role in Poland as a strong opposition voice to the authoritarian regime. Once Communism was gone, Catholicism remained a very popular voice in the rural countryside. Issues such as abortion and homosexuality produce lively polemic in Poland, but remain in the realm of discussion.

During the days of Communist rule in Eastern Europe, some GLBT individuals were jailed and public harassment was common. Nowadays there are no local laws on the books that condemn homosexuality and/or sodomy. In fact, the opposite seems true. In the Czech Republic, for example, there are gay civil union initiatives circulating in Parliament. In Hungary, government officials are considering domestic partnerships. Police in these countries are not known for harassing gay people and very few American GLBT students have reported overt homophobia.

Students who study abroad in Eastern European programs mostly live in university dormitories (with other English speakers) or have the option to rent their own apartments. Since the majority of them do not live with local families there is a particular challenge that must be overcome – language. In most cases, this is true for a student’s initial stay in the host country. However, joining a GLBT organization or participating in GLBT community events offer another way to meet locals (and not hang out with fellow Americans). This becomes a particular issue in Prague, a city filled with English-speaking ex-patriots and currently the number one tourist destination in all of Europe. Despite this influx of foreigners, which in itself is a rich example of Post-Communist transition, the local GLBT scene in Prague offers any motivated student a chance to meet Czechs and practice their Czech language skills. Similarly, Poland and Hungary offer a rewarding language (and cultural!) experience when students participate in the GLBT scene. Overall, Eastern Europe is a unique stage to learn how societies transition to full-fledged democracies while offering various opportunities for GLBT participants in study abroad programs.

NAFSA Region XII Conference in San Jose Holds First Rainbow SIG Meeting

Jacqueline Bedard, University of California

Darrell Kicker from University California-Riverside and Jacqueline Bedard joined forces and hosted a Rainbow SIG this year at Region XII. This was the first ever SIG discussion and meeting for this region. Seven people attended, which was only just over 1% (and we know that there should have been at least 10%!) but awareness of the SIG was raised overall. "Next year we expect to have a stronger turnout," asserted the SIG planners.